

A STORY WITH A PALINDROMIC LAROM

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It is not often that science comes to the aid of literature. But here is a case in which a development in science makes a difference to literature, and indeed could have made a difference to life and death themselves.

You will recall George Marvill's tale of Sydney Yendys, the man who discovered perhaps rather late in life that his name was palindromic (Howard Bergerson, *Palindromes and Anagrams* (Dover, 1973), pp 12-14). Thereafter he found himself under a palindromic spell, and finally dedicated the rest of his life to composing a full-length palindromic novel entitled *D'neeht*. After thirty years he asked his friends round to witness the finished product, and proudly turned the manuscript to the middle page, where the central pivotal sentence appeared. *D'neeht* was, Marvill tells us, "an anti-war novel; into the pivotal sentence, appropriately enough, was condensed the essential theme, the message of the book": SNUG AND RAW WAS I ERE I SAW WAR AND GUNS.

At that moment they all, Yendys included, spot the fatal flaw. Yendys is devastated. "An ampersand," someone cries, "that's all you need." Of course, this is correct, for it would produce the well-known palindrome SNUG & RAW WAS I ERE I SAW WAR & GUNS. But Yendys cannot be consoled by such a makeshift, megatarts stratagem. Believing that thirty years' work has been in vain, he flings the manuscript into the fire and then shoots himself.

And so ends the tale. But Yendys was too hasty, for not many years later science would have come to his aid. He could then have made the subject of his novel the world-weary recollections of a genetic engineer and military man who has become disenchanted with both professions and has turned to ecological activism and pacifism instead. The central pivotal sentence of the novel would then have been a real palindrome, one which could have been extracted and given its own title, *A Former Molecular Biologist and Soldier Looks Back*: SNUG AND RAW WAS I ERE I SAW WAR, DNA, GUNS.

It is a general fact that life depends on DNA. In the particular case of Sydney Yendys it was the unfortunate lack of DNA that made his life impossible to sustain. It is also a fact that the structure of DNA is itself palindromic (Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Godel, Escher, Bach* (Harvester Press, 1979), p 201). The moral is simple: it is time to bring about the reunification of the arts and the sciences. No more two cultures! Name no one man!